Eighth in a series of articles recalling the vehicles that were and are uniquely Marine.

Battle Honors of the Marine Amphibian VIII. The Glory Road

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In 1940 the Fleet Marine Force had two brigades and two air groups; 5 years later it had 303,500 Marines organized into 2 corps with 6 divisions and 4 air wings. Included were 13 amtrac battalions, the first appearing in 1942 as untried transport units. With the landing at Tarawa in November 1943 when 125 amtracs of the 2d Amtrac Battalion landed the 2d Marine Division over the reef off Betio Island, they became indispensable constituents of landing forces.

The 1st, 2d, and 3d Amtrac Battalions formed in 1942 with 100 LVT(1)s each were all deployed to the South Pacific with their parent divisions. The 1st and 2d on Guadalcanal in 1942–43 helped end Japanese expansion. Then, in the campaign to isolate the Japanese base at Rabaul, the 3d Marine Division landed on Bougainville in November 1943 to block one access, and the 1st Marine Division invaded western New Britain a month later to block another. The last was shut in March 1944 by the 4th Marines' landing on Emirau Island with Marine amtracs from the 3d Battalion. Throughout these operations, LVT(1)s and improved LVT(2)s, available late in 1943, earned high praise for their unique ability to overcome impossible terrain. The Central Pacific campaign, opened at Tarawa, multiplied these accolades.

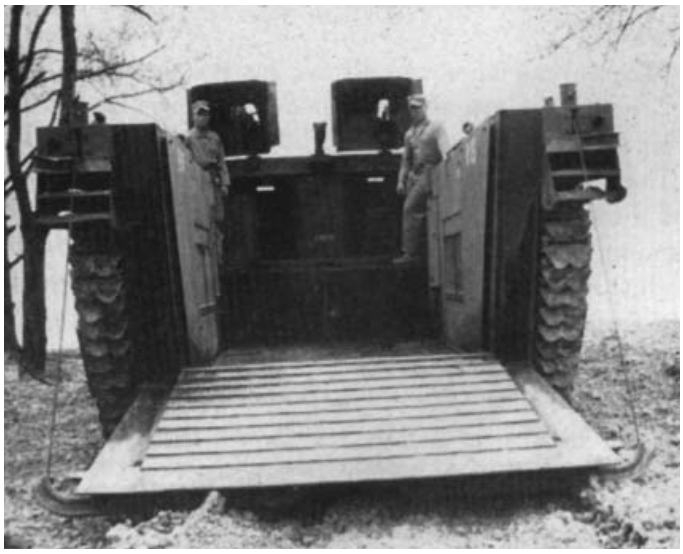
***Amphibian tractors played a significant role in bringing about this event on the deck of the USS* Missouri.**

On 5 December 1943, the new 4th Marine Division was authorized to use 4th Amtrac Battalion personnel to form the 10th Battalion reinforced, needed for the landing at Kwajalein in the Marshalls. A month later, these units left San Diego; 25 days after that they were in action. Some amtracs mounted 4.5-inch rocket launchers, others had mine-detonating grapnels; both proved useless. The landings, successful despite delays, were attended by the 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion. Its 68 LVT(A)1s, essentially LVT(2)s mounting a 37mm gun, supported the advance of assault infantry during the landing. Their effectiveness, regrettably, was limited by their vulnerability and light armament.

Amtrac battalions became Corps troops in 1944 and were assigned to divisions as needed. In the Marianas campaign beginning 15 June 1944 at Saipan, the 2d and 4th Marine Divisions landed in eight amtrac battalions, four Army and four Marine (2d, 5th, 10th, and 2d Armored). The return to Guam on 21 July was made by the 3d Division and 1st Marine Brigade in amtracs of the 3d and 4th Battalions behind 1st Armored. Finally, the 4th Division was put ashore on Tinian on 24 July by the remaining amtracs of the Saipan landing force. A refined ship-to-shore control organization with amtrac liaison officers at key points made for flawless landings. The designation of LSTs as aid stations or for amtrac maintenance was helpful, and the introduction of LVT(4)s with ramp and LVT(A)4s with 75mm howitzer was welcome. By then battalions had modified amtracs to provide recovery and field maintenance capabilities needed for salvage of disabled vehicles. On the negative side was the failure of amtracs at Saipan to advance directly to the first high ground before offloading assault troops, largely because the prelanding bombardment had destroyed beach exits.

See Amphibians On Parade, p. 107.

Amphibians On Parade continued from p. 120.



Two views of the LVT(3), which was the principal amtrac at Okinawa and into the postwar era.

The seizure of Peleliu, next on the Central Pacific agenda, required the 1st Marine Division to use 1st Amtrac Battalion personnel to organize the 6th Amtrac and 3d Armored Battalions. The landing on 15 September 1944 succeeded, as did the use of amtracs to guide tanks over the reef, but losses were high. The bloodbath intensified when the Marines encountered Japanese burrowed deep in the fragmented terrain. Four amtracs with flamethrowers helped rout them but were themselves too vulnerable. After a month of unremitting combat, the decimated 1st Division was relieved by Army units, who continued fighting until the end of November.

The 3d, 5th, 10th, and 11th Amtrac Battalions with the 2d Armored Battalion landed the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions on Iwo Jima on 19 February 1945. The amtrac battalions then expected to leave. However, because the amtracs' cleated tracks made them the only vehicles able to move freely over the volcanic ash, they were sentenced to hard labor until the island was secured. A month later the 1st, 4th, 8th, and 9th Amtrac Battalions and the 1st and 3d Armored Battalions landed the 1st and 6th Marine Divisions on Okinawa. Two Army divisions in an equal number of amtrac battalions landed on the Marines' right. This began a 4-month struggle in which cargo amtracs served as armored personnel carriers, armored amphibians performed as self-propelled artillery, and new twin-engine LVT(3)s revealed superior capabilities.

Even as the amtracs continued searching for better ways to serve, two nuclear weapons forced Japan's surrender on 14 August 1945. This abrupt climax was followed by rapid demobilization. By spring 1946, the Fleet Marine Force numbered 35,000 men, and the amtrac battalions had passed into legend.

US MC

AMPHIBIAN TRACTOR PRODUCTION & USMC UTILIZATION IN WWII

MODEL	NUMBER BUILT	PRODUCTION YEAR	FIRST COMBAT
LVT(1)	1,225	1941	Guadalcanal
LVT(2)	2,963	1943	Tarawa
LVT(A)1	509	1943	Kwajalein
LVT(A)2	450	1943	New Britain
LVT(3)	2,962	1944	Okinawa
LVT(4)	8,348	1943	Saipan
LVT(A)4	1,890	1944	Saipan
LVT(A)5	269	1945	Korea

Notes

1) A prototype LVT(A)1 was built in June 1942.
2) The LVT(A)2 was a cargo vehicle built of light armor for the Army. Turreted vehicles used the hull.
3) The LVT(3) was built by Borg-Warner, all other amtracs were built by the Food Machinery Corp.
4) All amtracs, other than the LVT(1) and LVT(3) were variants of the basic LVT(2) design.
5) The LVT(2) was designed in 1941 but not put into production until 1943 because the LVT(1) model was frozen at the start of the war to endure maximum production.